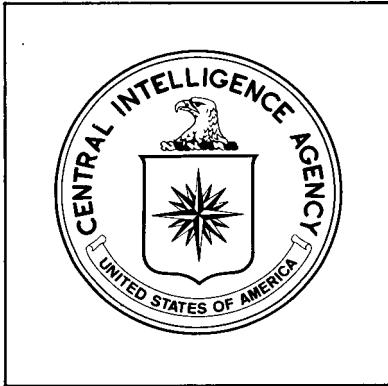


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MIDDLE EAST – AFRICA – SOUTH ASIA

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Middle East - Africa Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

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North Yemen

Hamdi Strengthens Grip on the Army

Colonel Ibrahim Hamdi, head of the ruling command council and commander-in-chief of the North Yemeni army, took effective control of all key military units on April 27 when he relieved, without incident, two important army officers of their commands. The dismissed officers are relatives of Sinan Abu Luhum, an opportunistic tribal leader who has ties with North Yemeni leftists and reportedly also has Iraqi backing.

Abu Luhum has been maneuvering in recent months to exacerbate the strained relations between the moderate Hamdi and the conservative Sheikh Abdallah al-Ahmar, the country's most powerful tribal leader and head of the Consultative Assembly. North Yemeni leftists anticipate they would be able to pick up the pieces should a donnybrook occur between moderates and rightists. In that event, the leftists would probably install former prime minister Muhsin al-Ayni in power.

Unless he was involved in Hamdi's decision to remove the Abu Luhum brothers, al-Ahmar may read their dismissal as Hamdi's way of eliminating the threat from his left before moving to a showdown with traditionalist forces. We have no evidence that this is Hamdi's intention; several of his top-level supporters have told US officials recently, however, that they fear such a showdown in the next several months.

Al-Ahmar has been applying heavy pressure on Hamdi this spring to bring to a speedy conclusion the so-called "transitional period" of military rule that began in mid-June 1974 and to return government to civilian hands. Al-Ahmar anticipates that new assembly elections would result in a larger role for tribal conservatives. Until recently Hamdi and his

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military and civilian supporters--who consider al-Ahmar and other locally-oriented sheikhs as drags on modernization--favored a delay until at least late this year.

After a three-day meeting with al-Ahmar in early April, however, Hamdi and the command council agreed that military rule would end on June 13 and that assembly elections would take place immediately--providing that the Consultative Assembly has drafted a constitutional amendment acceptable to the command council concerning the form of the country's executive authority. We are not certain what Hamdi wants, but we believe he favors a presidential system, rather than the cumbersome collegial executive provided for in the current constitution. Hamdi also probably favors reducing the age requirement; the constitution now provides that members of the Republican Council--the collegial executive--must be at least 40 years old. Hamdi is in his late 30s. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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India-Bangladesh

Agreement on Ganges Water

India and Bangladesh have come to an interim agreement for sharing water from the Ganges River. It should help ease recently growing tensions between Dacca and its closest ally.

The agreement allows India to operate its \$200-million Farakka barrage on a trial basis through May, the last half of the area's dry season. The Indians agreed, however, to limit their diversion of water to 16,000 cubic feet per second or less. The system's maximum diversion capability is 40,000 cubic feet per second; the river flows at an average rate of about 55,000 cubic feet per second at this time of year. During the trial period, water flows will be closely monitored by joint teams whose observations will be used in future negotiations.

As a result of the agreement, the economic damage that Bangladesh will suffer because of the dam will be limited over the short run. Enough water will be available for areas of the country irrigated from the Ganges, although additional silting may hamper operations of the already troubled \$132-million Ganges-Kobadak irrigation project.

In the long run, however, repeated dry season diversions of even minimal amounts of Ganges water from Bangladesh would limit the potential for expanding surface water irrigation in Bangladesh. A permanent reduction of the Ganges flow would also increase salt water intrusion, complicating numerous coastal agriculture projects and the major Chandpur irrigation scheme. In abnormally dry years, Indian diversion would leave a large stretch of the Ganges in Bangladesh unnavigable even by the small boats engaged in river commerce. Likely additional Ganges use by Indian irri-

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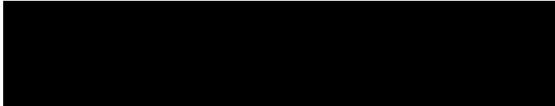
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gation projects upstream from the barrage would worsen the impact of Indian withdrawals at Farakka.

Diversion during the low-water season was the most controversial issue in the protracted negotiations, and the concessions the Indians made for the trial period do not necessarily presage the terms of a permanent agreement. For New Delhi, the Farakka barrage represents, among other things, hope for restoration of Calcutta, the principal port and urban center for eastern India. Besides helping to expand operations at the port, the barrage is supposed to ease Calcutta's acute water shortage, which has hampered industrial production and worsened health problems.

Although the Indians of course want to maximize the returns they have counted on from their investment in the dam, their desire to retain the friendship of Bangladesh constrains them from pushing their case with Dacca quite as hard as they had in negotiations with Pakistan before the 1971 war. Moreover, New Delhi is mindful that diversion of Ganges water would violate the UN's Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States, which India supported. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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